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THE NORTH WEST COMPANY

By

A. S. MORTON, M.A. (Oxon.)
Author of "Knights Errant of the Wilderness"

PRICE 10 CENTS

THE RYERSON PRESS
TORONTO

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THE NORTH WEST COMPANY

PEOPLE take it for granted that the Canadian North West is a simple geographical term, indicating that our prairie region is north-west of, say, Montreal. The truth is that it is only a little north of west, and the French were comparatively correct in calling their forts beyond Lake Superior *les postes de l'Ouest*—the western posts. The phrase North West has come down to us from the early English fur-traders of Montreal. With the goods for the trade in their canoes, they took what was roughly a westerly course up the River Ottawa as far as its tributary, the Mattawa, which they followed up and from which they portaged across to Lake Nipissing. So far it was an arduous journey. Now came a pleasanter run down stream on the French River to Georgian Bay, and along the shore north of Manitoulin Island to the point at which the waterway to Lake Superior and that to Lake Michigan lay before them. Here they took the latter route to Michilimakinac on the strait leading to Lake Michigan, for it was an old French post, a great rendezvous of Indians, French-Canadians, and now of the English—all bent on the trade in furs. Michilimakinac owed its

pre-eminence as a fur mart to its proximity to the routes to Lake Superior and Lake Michigan, but above all to the abundant food supply obtainable there—fish from the lake, and corn grown in the gardens of the settlement or by the Indians at their villages. The fish went to feed the people who thronged the rendezvous; the Indian corn, when mixed with a little fish or fat, afforded a light and sustaining diet for the crews of the canoes upon their long voyages. If the traders took the route past the settlement to Lake Michigan and down to Green Bay and the Mississippi, as many of them did, they went south-west. If, on the other hand, they retraced their steps so as to go up the St. Mary River to the Sault and into Lake Superior to the rendezvous on the north-west shore of the lake, at that time Grand Portage, just south of the International Boundary and about thirty miles from Fort William, and so on to Lake Winnipeg, they went, as they said, to the north-west. In time the traders on this route entered into an agreement to trade as one "concern" as they called it, under the name of the North West Company. It was these men who first

FOUNDING THE NORTH WEST COMPANY

HENRY AND THE FROBISHERS, MEETING AT CUMBERLAND HOUSE AS GUESTS OF MATTHEW COCKING AND THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY, FORM A TRADING ALLIANCE TO COMPETE WITH THE GREAT COMPANY.

used the term North West of the region beyond Lake Superior, for it was north-west from their last starting point, Michilimakinac.

After the English conquest of Canada, fur-traders, Americans like Alexander Henry the elder, Englishmen, like the Frobisher brothers, and Scotsmen, one Mac after another, rushed in to make their fortunes in fur. They first met the Indians and French-Canadians who came down from what was called the Upper Country at Michilimakinac, but, as the best furs came from the wooded belt which runs north-westward from Lake Superior, they learned to meet them at Grand Portage on the north-west shore of that lake. Soon that was not enough for them. The more adventurous crossed the "great portage" nine miles long which gave the place its name, to the Pigeon River, followed it up to the height of land, where they portaged to the waters which flow westward and which are now the boundary between the United States and Canada, and ran down to Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods. Crossing the lake and paddling down the Winnipeg River to Lake Winnipeg, they found themselves within reach of the Red River and the Assini-

boine, of Lake Winnipegosis and the country around Lake Dauphin, the Swan River and the Red Deer River, and finally within reach of the Saskatchewan. In 1769, James Finlay, the elder, had a post on this last river some twenty miles below our Nipawin, and in 1773 another at Nipawin itself. In 1771-1773 one Thomas Curry made a fortune at Cedar Lake in furs got from the Indians and French-Canadians who brought them down the Saskatchewan. It was the operations of these men, cutting off the stream of furs which used to go down to the Hudson's Bay Company, at York Factory on the Hayes River, which forced the English Company to come inland and build Cumberland House where the waterways parted, the Saskatchewan route leading westward along the edge of the prairies and the forest home of the beaver, to the Rocky Mountains and the northern route by Cumberland Lake, Lake Namew and the Sturgeon Weir River leading up to the Churchill and so to the Athabasca country.

In 1770-1771, a Montreal trader, Joseph Frobisher, was on the Red River at Fort Frobisher, not far from Selkirk. In 1774

he and probably his brother Thomas were at a post where the forest belt and prairies meet by the banks of the Saskatchewan. The post stood on the north side of the river, about two miles below Peonan Creek and three from our Fort à la Corne, and was known as Fort des Prairies or possibly Fort aux Trembles. Its inmates would trade the furs gathered by the Indians in the woods to the north, while they literally lived on the fat of the land in the form of buffalo meat or of pemmican, a mixture of dried buffalo meat pounded fine and fat ("grease") in equal parts seasoned with Saskatoon berries.

The best furs, particularly beaver, whose wool was used to make hats—the prototype of that weak and shabby imitation which we know as the silk hat—were to be found to the north. The beaver lives in the streams, and feeds upon certain reeds in the rivers and marshes and upon the willow, the poplar and the aspen. Accordingly the forest belt to the north, broken by a tangle of swamps, streams and lakes, along whose shores willows and poplars and aspens predominate, was the real home of the beaver. Moreover, the farther north one goes the longer the winter

and the thicker and finer the beaver's fur. So, in the spring of 1775, Joseph Frobisher, doubtless going down from Fort des Prairies, passed up from the Saskatchewan by the route that runs from Cumberland House and took the portage across to the Churchill River. There he met Indians taking their furs down to the Bay, to Fort Churchill to the Hudson's Bay Company[1] who had equipped them for their hunt on credit, and to whom the furs were being brought in payment. Not without difficulty—for the Indians wished to be true to their creditors—Frobisher induced them to do business with him. He finally made such a rare trade that the portage is known to this day as the Portage du Traite—the Portage of the Trade. Naturally Frobisher determined to come back next autumn. After taking his treasure-trove to Grand Portage, he was on the way back with his brother Thomas and a partner, Charles Patterson.

"Where the carcase is, there will the crows be also,"—where there was money in furs there the traders would crowd in. On Lake

[1]See *The Hudson's Bay Company,* by Robert Watson, in this series.

Winnipeg, on the way up, the Frobisher party fell in with Alexander Henry and his partner, Jean Baptiste Cadotte, who in turn had picked up Peter Pond. They came as one party to Cumberland House where they were entertained by the Hudson's Bay Company's officer, Matthew Cocking, who looked on them as intruders, with what might be described as a frigid hospitality. We do not know what these men were saying to one another as they ate the Hudson's Bay Company's fish—all that there was to eat at Cumberland House—but we may judge by what they did. Though competitors, the one with the other, they must have grown more friendly as they journeyed together along Lake Winnipeg and up the Saskatchewan—friendly enough to discuss their problems freely. They must have asked themselves how they could, as individuals, stand up against the strong Hudson's Bay Company just come inland. They must have discussed the long and costly journey for their goods all the way from Montreal, and asked how it could possibly pay if they went to the same lakes and streams and by competing with one another only got small cargoes of fur to take

back over that costly route in half empty canoes. At any rate, Peter Pond determined to have a whole field to himself, and went all the way back by Lake Winnipegosis to Lake Dauphin where he had been the winter before. But both Henry and the Frobishers were bent on going into the wooded belt, the fur field to the north of Cumberland House. Would they go as rivals or would they co-operate? They decided to make an agreement to cover the trade of that season, and in so doing they launched the first Co-operative Association, the first Pool in the history of the Canadian North West. Their immediate reason was to eliminate competition ruinous to themselves, and because it meant pouring out rum in return for furs, ruinous to the Indians.

There were other important reasons for an agreement. The problem of food supply was a very pressing one in the woods to the north. There was nothing to be had but fish from its lakes—fish three times a day, without bread or vegetables, and often without salt. The traders were ready to bear this hardship for the wealth of furs they would gain, but here came in an even more acute

problem. Fish was too perishable a food for their crews on their long journey to Grand Portage on Lake Superior, and if they stayed to hunt and fish on their way they would not reach that rendezvous by the end of July in time to meet their backers bringing goods from Montreal, and waiting to take the furs down to be shipped to the London market. Now Frobisher had a solution for this problem. His canoes from Fort des Prairies were to bring down pemmican, that concentrated form of meat which kept indefinitely, from the plains of the Saskatchewan to provision the canoes on their post-haste journey to Grand Portage. In a word, the food resources of the prairies were to be brought to the rescue of the fur trade of the forest belt. The agreement ran, that the Frobishers and Henry and Cadotte, should pool their goods and likewise the furs and pemmican, gathered both in the forest belt and by the prairies of the Saskatchewan, and distribute them to the partners in the spring in proportion to the goods put by each firm into the pool. Accordingly the Frobishers and Henry went together up the Sturgeon Weir River to Beaver (Amisk) Lake, west of Flin Flon,

to build a common fort there, while Patterson and Cadotte went up to Fort des Prairies to gather furs, and also pemmican with which to bring out the canoes to Grand Portage. This scheme proved so successful that similar arrangements for one and three years were made in succession, each time with a larger proportion of the traders in the combine. The agreement of the year 1784 definitely founded the North West Company, and that of 1787 brought in its last competitors, the firm of Gregory, McLeod & Co., of Montreal, and its "wintering partners," Peter Pangman and that incomparable trader and adventurer, Alexander Mackenzie.

The North West Company was now a hundred per cent. pool in which all the traders of the North West, the "wintering partners," the producers of the furs and their agents in Montreal, the firms of McTavish, Frobisher & Co., and Gregory, McLeod & Co. on the marketing side, were brought into one grand "concern." The annual meeting was held at Grand Portage in July, when the producers brought down their furs to Lake Superior and the marketing agents brought up the goods from Montreal. The producers and

their marketing agents, all as partners, sat around one table to plan the business of the ensuing season. It was the finest business machine of its time on the continent of North America. Each partner provided the goods for the coming season or the capital represented by his share or shares, and was credited with his proportion of the net returns of the trading year.

At that common table the requirements of each district or department were considered and provided for, and what one fort lacked, be it canoes, birch bark or gum for canoes, babiche, snowshoes or pemmican, was provided by the posts at which they could be easily obtained. Above all, arrangements were made by which pemmican was provided at strategic points to provision the canoes of the various departments on their untiring journey to and from the wintering grounds. The agents saw to it that there was corn from Michilimakinac and Detroit at Grand Portage for the first stage in the journey. The post at Rainy Lake kept a store of wild rice to supplement this on the voyage to Fort Alexander, on the River Winnipeg, hard by the Lake of that name. A store of pemmican from

the posts on the Assiniboine was waiting at this fort for the canoes going or coming. The pemmican of the Saskatchewan lay in the depot at Cumberland House to bring the Saskatchewan brigade to the neighbourhood of Prince Albert and Fort Carlton, on the prairies, where the partners would take to horse and hunt fresh meat for the brigade as it made its toilsome way up-stream to the wintering ground, and also to take the Northern Brigades to Île à la Crosse. At this last fort a supply of pemmican, taken north from the Saskatchewan during the winter on dog sleds, would be waiting to provision the Athabasca, the Great Slave Lake and Peace River canoes, at least to Lake Athabasca if not to their final destination, or to take them and the English (Churchill) River brigade out to Cumberland House. If the supply of fish at a fort in the forest belt gave out, as it did at Green Lake, in 1795, when the men had to gather the fish bones cast out in the fall, to make an attenuated soup which might keep flesh and bones together, an express from the nearest post on the Saskatchewan brought relief in the form of pemmican by the swiftest teams of dog-sleds to hand. The proudest

achievement of the North West Company was its unity and co-ordination—a unity and co-ordination based upon the principle of co-operation.

Their splendid organization enabled the North West Company, handicapped as it was with the long and costly transportation to Montreal, to hold its own, and even to compete successfully with the Hudson's Bay Company which enjoyed the short and cheap route through Hudson Strait to the London market. Where one Company established a post the other came in to build over against it. In this way the two companies worked their way up the Northern Saskatchewan with the woods to the north and the prairies to the south, from beaver region to beaver region. In 1787 they were near the mouth of the Big Gully, north of Maidstone, Sask. —the Northwesters in Pine Island Fort, the Hudson's Bay Company in Manchester House. In 1792 they were in our Alberta, north of Vermilion, the North West Company in Fort George, and the Englishmen across a gully in Buckingham House. In 1795 they were side by side at the junction of the Sturgeon River and the Saskatchewan

in what is now Fort Saskatchewan Settlement—the Northwesters in Fort Augustus and the Hudson's Bay Company in their first Edmonton House. In 1799 the two companies faced one another at Rocky Mountain House, under the shadow of the Rockies. In 1809 they were at the present Edmonton, the Hudson's Bay Company in Edmonton House, and the North West Company in Fort Augustus. Similarly on the River Assiniboine the Hudson's Bay Company's Brandon House opposed the North West Company's Fort Assiniboine, and on its upper waters Fort Charlton contended with Fort Alexandria. On the Swan River and Red Deer River likewise, the two Companies faced one another.

In this rivalry of post with post the North West Company had many advantages. The constitution of the Company required "wintering partners," on retiring, to dispose of their shares under certain conditions to the younger men in the service. Thus, not only were the heads of forts partners, but clerks were potential partners in the concern and all would do their utmost for it, while the Hudson's Bay Company's servants were salaried

men without the same incentive to exertion. While the French-Canadian servants in the North West "concern" had little or no chance to rise to the position as partners, they enjoyed a *camaraderie* with their chiefs which was largely unknown in the posts of the unbending Englishmen. After the long and toilsome journey up the Saskatchewan they would celebrate their reunion with their families by a grand dance. Similarly, on St. Andrew's Day and New Year's Day. The following is the record of St. Andrew's Day at Fort George, in 1794:

> 30th Nov.—This being St. Andrew's Day, the men observed the usual ceremony of presenting Bouquets [a volley from their guns] to his Votaries, on which occasion Mr. Shaw gave them 6 gallons Rum to divert themselves, which they did with a Venegeance, for one bottle succeeded another so quick that scarcely a man in the Fort escaped a Black eye.

When the season's trade was over and the canoes were ready to leave with the furs, all—high and low—enjoyed a gala day of racing.

Between whiles business would be proceeding in a remarkably efficient way. The crews of the canoes would be detailed to

various tasks, such as hunting buffalo for the table of the fort, making pemmican, or trapping furs. Great bands of Indians awaited the arrival of the canoes, their teepees pitched outside the palisades of the fort. They would put on their finest feathers and paint for the ceremonial reception immediately after the goods had been put in order for the trade. The chiefs and their following would arrive in their savage splendour and would be welcomed with a volley from the fort, and taken to the wintering partners' "Indian Hall" for a council. They would finally make a present of furs to the fort and receive an appropriate gift, mostly of rum. Then would follow a scene of drunkenness which we of the twentieth century cannot contemplate without qualms of conscience. When the drinking ceased trading began. Similar scenes were re-enacted when the Indians brought their furs to trade in the spring.

"Men, women and children, promiscuously mingle together," says the Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray, "and join in one diabolical clamour of singing, crying, fighting, etc., and to such excess do they indulge their love of drinking that all regard to

decency or decorum is forgotten . . ." We prefer not to print the next sentence. We must not allow our admiration for the achievements of the North West Company to cloak the scenes of degradation and vice amid which the partners moved unconcerned, and by which they brought rich dividends to their company.

Much pleasanter is the story of the achievements of the Northwesters in the way of adventuresome explorations. Before the formation of the Company, Peter Pond[1] had made his way up the Churchill River and across the famous Methy Portage, the height of land, beyond to the Clearwater River and down its waters and those of the Athabasca. He had built what was known afterward as "the old establishment," some forty miles from the inflow of this last stream into Lake Athabasca. He appears to have even had outposts on Great Slave Lake and on the Peace River. Pond was a man of restless curiosity. He was interested in the people about him, but above all in the horizon before him. He questioned the natives upon the

[1]See *Alexander Henry and Peter Pond,* by Lawrence L. Burpee, in this series.

country to the west and north, whither the rivers flowed and what lay in the great beyond. He even tried, with the meagre resources in the way of paper and ink, and what-not of a fort in the wilderness, to put it all down in map form. His maps may be rough and inaccurate, but they are of extraordinary interest and value to the historian. Pond, however, was also a fur-trader, and kept himself well posted in the fur trade of the continent. He knew of the explorations of Captain Cook and of the wealth in furs of the Pacific coast revealed by him. He knew of the fortunes being made by the sale of the sea-otter skins of the American Pacific in the Chinese market. His eyes were strained westward to find the route to this fresh Eldorado of the fur-trader. Pond was a wintering partner of the North West Company from the beginning, 1784. He was fortunate in having, from 1787, Alexander Mackenzie[1] for his junior in the Department of Athabasca. It would appear that he was responsible for the arrangements for Mackenzie's exploration north from Lake Athabasca. However, he left the Company at

[1]See *Alexander Mackenzie,* by Adrian Macdonald, in this series.

this juncture and his mantle as an explorer fell to his young and intrepid junior officer.

Mackenzie was a man of deep insight, far-reaching dreams, and, what is of equal importance, of that intrepid spirit and indomitable will by which schemes, visionary in appearance, become substantial achievements. He scanned the horizon to the west with the same burning curiosity as his chief. Moreover, as a thorough man of business, he was deeply concerned at the cost of the long line of transportation to Montreal. At this stage in his career the restless question faced him: could he, by following that great waterway, the Slave River, reach the Pacific at Cook's Inlet, and open an easy route for goods for the fur trade of Athabasca? He tried to answer the question, in 1789, by a journey northward to Great Slave Lake and down the river afterward named for him to the ocean. Alas, when he got there he found that it was the Arctic and not the Pacific Ocean. An endless sheet of ice answered his question in the negative. In his correspondence he calls what we know as the Mackenzie River, the River Disappointment. In 1793 he sought to wrest an answer in the

positive by that far less promising route, the Peace River. He ascended it from his wintering ground at the mouth of the Smoky River by the fearful whirlpools of the Peace River canyon to the forks of the Finlay and Parsnip. He ascended this last and made his way to the Fraser River and down-stream to below the Blackwater. His progress being stayed there, he returned to the Blackwater and crossed overland to the Pacific. Mackenzie thus found a way, not simply across the continent, but to the great fur fields of the Pacific coast. He now addressed himself to the task of persuading the North West Company to enter in and occupy the field, but he knew it could not be done by the long and costly water route to England by way of Montreal. When he came down to Upper Canada he expounded a scheme to Governor Simcoe, involving the formation of a great chartered company which should include both the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, and which would abandon Montreal, making the Hudson's Bay route the line of trade to the fur fields of the Pacific coast. The great Northwesters of Montreal, Simon McTavish and William

M'Gillivray, would not consider this far-reaching scheme. So Mackenzie left the North West Company, in 1799, and joined the opposition, which passed under the name of the X. Y. Company. As we shall see, he stood true to his grandiose scheme of a union with the Hudson's Bay Company and to his belief in the Hudson Bay route to Athabasca and the Pacific.

When Mackenzie left the North West Company his dreams were taken up by no less a person than Duncan M'Gillivray, the nephew of his arch-opponent, Simon McTavish. M'Gillivray, like Mackenzie, was in a frontier department. He was head of the Forts des Prairies on the North Saskatchewan, with Rocky Mountain House near its confluence with the Clearwater for his farthest post. Like Mackenzie, he was looking across the Rockies toward the fur fields of the Pacific coast. In the winter of 1800-1801, he had what he believed to be the only copy of Vancouver's *Voyages in Canada* with him in his post at the foot of the Rockies, and busied himself making extracts for a voyage planned for the following summer to the mouth of the Columbia. In 1801 he crossed

the Rockies to the Kootenay River and the upper Columbia, but he took sick and had to return with his enterprise unaccomplished. The next year he left the Upper Country to become one of the agents of the Company, but he never forgot his dream of leading his "concern" to the fur-fields of the Pacific coast. Under his presidency as agent Simon Fraser[1] was sent up the Peace River and beyond the Rockies, where he established Fort McLeod, on the lake of that name, Fort James on Stuart Lake, Fort Fraser on Fraser Lake, and Fort George, at the confluence of the Fraser and Nechaco rivers—the first permanent settlements of Europeans in continental British Columbia. It was under instructions from him and his wintering partners assembled at Fort William, which was now their rendezvous, that Simon Fraser, in 1808, penetrated down the Fraser River to the Pacific coast, and that David Thompson[2] crossed into the valley of the Columbia and mapped his way slowly, but with great exactness, to the mouth of the Columbia, which he reached in 1811.

[1]See *Simon Fraser,* by V. L. Denton, in this series.
[2]See *David Thompson,* by Arthur S. Morton, in this series.

The journeys of these officers of the North West Company extended the trade of "the concern" to the Pacific slope, and brought a wide region within the ken of civilization; but, more important still, they staked out Britain's claim to the Pacific coast and thereby laid the foundations of our wide Dominion. This is the most notable contribution of the North West Company to the history of our land.

The last chapter in the story of the company is less pleasant reading. The expansion of its trade to the region beyond the Rockies accentuated the problem of the cost of transportation by the long route to Montreal, which was of such concern to Alexander, now Sir Alexander Mackenzie. While in opposition to his old company Mackenzie had won Edward Ellice, of London, to his views and to make an attempt to buy out the Hudson's Bay Company and thereby acquire their precious short route by the Bay to the fur-fields of the North West, and of our farthest west. The attempt failed. When, in 1804, Mackenzie returned to the North West Company, he and Duncan M'Gillivray were given power to offer the English com-

pany £2,000 a year for the right of transit for their goods through the Bay. This attempt to secure what we might call running powers through Hudson Strait also failed. During the period when Mackenzie was with the X. Y. Company, in opposition to the North West Company, both parties had kept bands of bullies at the forts to overawe the Indians, and carry it with a high hand over their opponents. This policy, which led to the murder of a Mr. King, a clerk of the North West Company on the Saskatchewan, habituated both parties to shameful deeds of violence. From about 1802 the North West Company began to apply the worst methods of the times in their opposition to the Hudson's Bay Company, either to beat them from the field, or to secure the use of their precious short route to England by Hudson Strait. Lord Selkirk[1] says as much, and he doubtless got his information from Sir Alexander Mackenzie when the two were working together to buy up Hudson's Bay Company stock. By 1808 the Hudson's Bay Company's £100 shares, which once had sold at £250, were selling as low as £50

[1]See *Lord Selkirk,* by Chester Martin, in this series.

to £60. Mackenzie now began to buy up shares to win control of the English Company, and realize his dream of a company with a charter which should combine both the North West and the English concerns. He persuaded Lord Selkirk to provide the capital and quietly buy the shares. However, when Selkirk found himself in the possession of shares enough to give him the control of the Hudson's Bay Company, he decided to keep them and reorganize the Company so as to bring it once more to prosperity. His scheme was to enter into the Athabasca region, noted for its beaver, and in order to be sure of success, to employ old Northwester servants, English and French-Canadian, instead of the unenterprising men from the Orkneys whom the Company had hitherto brought out to its service. Further, he was to found a colony on the Red River which would provide provisions in the country itself at a very low figure, and become a reservoir of Scottish, French-Canadian and half-breed servants who would provide labour much cheaper and more adapted to the country than the Orkneymen. Finally, the Colony would make good

the Company's right to the soil, and so strengthen its trade monopoly which had well-nigh slipped out of its hands.

These plans of Selkirk were no more than a natural and honourable attempt to save his Company from bankruptcy, but the North West Company began a disgraceful propaganda, accusing the noble lord of plotting to destroy their trade and drive them from the country. At best it was the pot calling the kettle black. In the first phase the Northwesters broke up Lord Selkirk's colony by inducing the settlers to abandon it, giving them a free passage by canoe to Canada and by attacking the Governor, Miles McDonell, in his Fort Douglas, and arresting him when he surrendered. They told the people of Canada, and even the Governor-General, that McDonell had fallen out with the half-breeds and Indians, but in truth it was the Indians who protected the remnant of the colonists from its white and half-breed enemies, guarded them and their cattle to the boats, and saw them safely away to Lake Winnipeg (1815). The courageous colonists returned, but only to face another crisis in the following spring when their new

Governor, William Semple, was shot down with twenty of their number by a band of half-breeds in the pay of the North West Company. Next year Selkirk himself arrived with soldier settlers of the De Meuron regiment, and placed the colony on something like a permanent basis (1817). Thus, though he suffered great financial loss, he was in nowise beaten.

Not less dramatic was the struggle in the Athabasca region. The Hudson's Bay Company, acting on their rights as Britons to trade in that region as well as the rival company, sent an old Northwester, John Clarke, with a well-equipped expedition manned mostly with French-Canadian voyageurs. The wintering partners of the North West Company protected themselves by hustling the Indians away into the woods, and driving the animals from the river banks, so that John Clarke's brigade could get no provisions. Finally, Clarke and the party which he led up the Peace River, were faced with starvation. A body of some twelve of the men who ventured a desperate march in the late autumn back to Lake Athabasca was starved to death. Clarke and

his officers were themselves forced to give up their goods to the Northwesters for the provisions which should save their lives. By 1818 the struggle between the two companies had developed into a blind and lawless faction fight.

The disgraceful welter of violence into which the officials of the North West Company had plunged their partners was ruinous for both companies. A number of the wintering partners resented the losses inflicted on them and the disgrace of the struggle. When the agreement by which they all worked together as one concern was about to come to an end, these partners, the producers of the furs, approached the Hudson's Bay Company to know if it would become their agent in case they should decide to drop McTavish, M'Gillivray & Co., of Montreal, their present agents. This proposal led to the famous union of 1821 in which, while the M'Gillivrays and Ellice were given a generous share in the new concern, they were practically eliminated from any control. Thus the great North West Company, which had once proudly boasted the possession of more than eighty-four posts

from Labrador to the mouth of the Columbia, disappears from history. The best of the wintering partners, however, entered the new concern, and contributed to it the spirit of adventure and enterprise which made the story of the North West Company one of the most fascinating chapters of Canadian history.

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4. STORIES OF HEROES

*Maisonneuve—*Lorne Pierce*
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